

NOTES ON BOOKS.

SIR JOHN LUBBOCK'S LIST—MR. RUSKIN—OCEANA.

FROM THE REGULAR CORRESPONDENT OF THE "THREE".

LONDON, Jan. 19.

Sir John Lubbock, banker, politician, and savant, has been amusing himself with the familiar exercise of composing a list of books for other people to read. The other people in this case are the members of the Working Men's College, and the list includes one hundred writers of all ages and many tongues. Its eccentricities are also many. The workingman is wisely advised to read the "Pensees" of Pascal, but nothing is said of the "Provinciales Letters." He is to be allowed one oration of Demosthenes, but none of Cicero, whose figures only as the author of the treatises "De Officiis," "De Amicitia," and "De Senectute." The list of Eastern Poetry does not include the "golden Eastern lay," Fitzgerald's version of which Tennyson has just been telling us is divinely done. Of Voltaire, Charles XIV., or Louis XIV., may be read. Besides Pascal, Voltaire and Montaigne there is absolutely nothing of French literature save Moliere and one romance of Marivaux, though Descartes as a philosopher finds a place where Aristotle does not. The French of this century are simply ignored; neither Victor Hugo nor Balzac is thought worthy of the British workingman's attention.

America, as a younger country, is treated by Sir John Lubbock worse than France; he allows but two American writers, Longfellow and Emerson. Of Franklin he seems never to have heard, or one would have thought Franklin just the man to be commended to the British artisan living in this most utilitarian of ages. To return to England, Southey has the honor of Sir John Lubbock's recommendation; Landor has not, nor Coleridge. Burke's "Select Works," whatever they may be, are thought deserving of notice. Macaulay is tolerated as an essayist, not as a historian. Novelists like Burke are to be taken in selections only, and the list of novelists, which omits Fielding, winds up with Bulwer Lytton. Cervantes is shut out altogether. "The Arabian Nights" are admitted; not, it is to be presumed, in Captain Burton's version. Altogether, Sir John Lubbock, as an adviser in literature, will hardly supersede Carlyle, or Emerson, or Comte, or the sundry others who have written on the choice of books.

There is no more futile occupation than this book-making. It is the expression, in part, of individual tastes; in part a mere record of stereotyped opinions. Certain authors must be included, perhaps a score; for the rest, the ground is more or less debatable. No man living has authority to exclude the greatest names, though as we shall see, there is at least one man living who has the courage to try. Sir John Lubbock, an able and versatile person, is destined of any great call to speak for literature; he would be the first, no doubt, to disclaim it. But in these days a man of position has only to speak on a subject, whether his own or not, to insure a certain degree of attention. A newspaper in search of a sensation is pretty sure to seize on his discourse as a pretext for some form of interview. This is what *The Pall Mall* has done. With characteristic assurance that paper thought proper, as it tells us, "to invite all the best guides in England to place their clews to the bewildering labyrinth of books at the service of the public."

Public men in England are easily drawn, and seem to care little what may be the character of the drawer. First among the "best guides" is the Prince of Wales. There is a story that a functionary attached to the personal service of the Prince was asked once upon a time what the Prince read. "Nothing," was the answer. "You do not mean literally nothing?" "I mean that His Royal Highness never opens a book nor newspaper." The functionary proceeded to explain that the Prince's reading was done for him by competent persons and the result served up to him in condensed form. Care was taken that he should not be ignorant of matters which it was desirable he should know. If this be a reproach to the Prince it was equally a reproach to Victor Hugo, of whom the same story has been told; truly, of his late years. However, the Prince makes modest answer by his secretary, Mr. Francis Knollys (to be pronounced Knollies), that he thinks Sir John Lubbock's list would hardly be improved upon, unless the "works" of Dryden could be added. There is a lady in London, one among the best-known of society queens, whose reputation as a reader is said to have been based originally upon a diligent study of Dryden, and assiduous quotation from him. The Prince has certainly heard this story—there is nothing he does not hear—and his mention of Dryden may have been suggested by it.

Mr. Gladstone was applied to not only because he is the "first of living statesmen," but also an omnivorous reader. He answers, on a post card, that he has no time to frame a list, but that he knows that Lord Acton has one ready made, which perhaps he might make known. Lord Acton has yet to be heard from. The really interesting answer comes from Mr. Ruskin, designated, rather rashly, as the first of living English men of letters, a title to which at least three writers have at least an equal claim. He has sent back the printed list of Sir John Lubbock, putting his pen lightly through the needless, and "blotlessly" through the rubbish and poison, which our banker-politician has advocated. The erasures amount to just one-half of the whole number and some of them are curious examples of Mr. Ruskin's prejudices. Among the writers whom he puts "lightly" in this new expatriate Index, are Pascal, Lucretius, Sophocles, that very Sophocles who, according to Mr. Arnold, "saw life clearly and saw it whole," Euripides, Gibson, Voltaire, Hume, Longfellow and Swift. Those whom he blots with heavy pen include Grotius a great smudge of ink on him, all the philosophers except Bacon, the two travellers, Cook and Darwin (Darwin is blackest), Southery, Hume as essayist, Macaulay, Emerson, Goethe, Thackeray and George Eliot.

By way of compensation, Mr. Ruskin makes an addition or two to the original catalogue. Of Plato he would have the British workingman read, not merely the *Plato and Republic*, but, "all." He brackets Pindar with Herodotus. Bacon is to be studied chiefly in "The New Atlantis." Carlyle, to Sir John Lubbock's mind, is mainly valuable for "Past and Present" (?) and "The French Revolution." Mr. Ruskin says "everything," and still more emphatically writes against Scott, out of whom the savant would leave us only selections, "every word." So many of Scott's words are surplusage and so slovenly is his style (so Scotch also, and often un-English), that Mr. Ruskin's recommendation is but too likely to mislead the unpractised reader. Scott is admirable for other qualities than those merely verbal. Mr. Ruskin's additions include also the first two books of Livy, all old books of travel, Humboldt, the "central model of modern travel," and James Forbes, "essential to the modern Swiss tourist." There remains, in his opinion, enough for a life's liberal reading, and choice for every true worker's loyal reading.

Some mention has lately appeared in English papers of a testimonial to Mr. Ruskin. Preparation was made for this month ago, but the circulators were marked private and confidential, and it is an open question how knowledge of the scheme got to the public press. It became, however, matter for discussion; editorial articles were written on it; one such appeared in *The Daily Telegraph*, and of this Mr. Ruskin himself has taken notice. He is not ungrateful for the kindness shown him, but cannot forbear a sneer at the "sentimental friends" who conceived the scheme of the address. What really angers him, however, is the suggestion of *The Telegraph* that he has altered his views on political economy. And he says:

The changes of "doctrine" to which you refer have been merely whether students should draw on gray paper or white, and the like; my political teaching has never changed in a single word or thought, and I have not the smallest desire to do so, though not acceptable to the wisdom of a country whose milchmaids cannot make butter nor her blacksmith bayonet.

Indeed, the writer whom Mr. Ruskin thus rebukes sought to have tested clear of this political economy school. It was to Mr. Ruskin as, above all other things, a teacher of political economy, that his "sentimental friends" desired to offer their homage. They explained in his manifesto, and this is

what, I presume, which limited the number of signatures. There are many of us who would rejoice to signify our respect and admiration for the writer on art, who nevertheless have never been able to take him seriously as a teacher on social and political subjects. With the perversity of genius and of the spoilt child, Mr. Ruskin has insisted, and still insists, on regarding his social and political writings as his chief claim to the gratitude of the public. It may be doubted whether the public will care more for them now that he has revealed the sources of his inspiration, and made it known that it is the wisdom of Homer and Plato which he applies to the problems of the present.

Messrs. Longmans have published Mr. Froude's admirable "Oceanus" in a form judiciously calculated to appeal to the buyer. The bluish sea-green cover may be meant to harmonize with the title, but the gilt and black lettering, the repetition of the title on the side and the strange device of a sun (whether setting or rising it is hard to say), flinging off its rays like the spokes of a wheel give to the volume externally a catch-penny appearance. A great many pennies go to the catching. It is a single \$2 volume of less than 400 pages, but it is offered to the public at 18s., or \$4.50. The excuse for enhancing the price may be found in the wood engravings, which courageously reproduce drawings by Mr. Froude and his travelling companion, Lord Elphinstone, which were in themselves, so far as one can judge, excellent. But the real secret of the dearness is the combination between publisher and circulating librarian. The latter is resolved that the public shall not buy books, but shall borrow them, and a publisher only too readily falls in with the scheme of a customer.

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